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How CIA job went to Turner

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Adm. Stansfield Turner is expected to get Senate confirmation as the new Director of the Central Intelligence Agency with a minimum of delay and questioning. His qualifications for the job seem so impressive that some observers are wondering why he was President Carter's second, rather than first, choice for that position.

The explanation is reported to be that Mr. Carter had originally earmarked Admiral Turner for the top Navy command, Chief of Naval Operations, which is the dream goal of every U.S. naval officer. The idea of moving him over to the CIA obviously arose out of the crash landing of the original nomination of Theodore Sorensen, a former Kennedy adviser.

The switch in assignments for Admiral Turner will save Mr. Carter a deal of trouble.

The act of Congress which set up the CIA specifically authorized the selection of a director from the military services, active or retired.

Analysis

Conservatives in Congress have been upset by what they have seen as too much "softness" on defense matters in the Carter appointments to date. The Sorensen nomination made them edgy and suspicious. In the wake of that admitted political mistake the "hawks" have been taking a second look at Cyrus Vance, the new Secretary of State, Dr. Harold Brown, the new Secretary of Defense, and Paul C. Warnke, the nominee for the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. None of the three are "doves," but taken together they make the real hawks uneasy. The Warnke nomination would have been in serious trouble without the Turner nomination to balance it off.

But the liberals in the Senate will find it difficult to object to an admiral who won a Rhodes scholarship, is as comfortable among intellectual civilians as among military people, has an insatiable curiosity, and who will listen to any idea with open mind.

The quality of his mind is illustrated by a passage from his article in the January issue of Foreign Affairs magazine on the naval balance. Commenting on the tendency to interpret Navy problems in terms of numbers of ships, he wrote:

"That the United States built 122 ships over 3,000 tons in the last 15 years and the U.S.S.R. only 57 as recently reported, has no meaning by itself, other than to refute another set of illogical statistics, such as was recently reported in a respected news magazine, that the Soviet Navy total 3,300 ships and the U.S. Navy 478. This latter comparison requires counting every 75-foot tugboat and barge and comparing it to who knows what."

Admiral Turner is not interested in such statistics, but rather in how well certain ships can perform the role for which they are built. One issue, he says, is not "a submarine versus a submarine, but a submarine versus aircraft, destroyers, and mines as well."

And in effect he has warned his own colleagues in the Navy to avoid "doomsday" assertions when trying to pry extra funds out of Congress. He points out that the damage done by such talk can outweigh the gain from a few extra ships.

In other words, he is a fighting man — but also a thinking fighting man who is no more swayed by parochial service thinking than was Dwight D. Eisenhower. President Carter admires him immensely, even to the point of saying that Admiral Turner "could be the next George Marshall." President Truman regarded General Marshall as the greatest American of his times.